

6-26-2012

## Mainstreaming, the Regular Education Initiative, and Inclusion as Lived Experience, 1974-2004: A Practitioner's View

Seth B. Harkins Dr.

National Louis University, [seth.harkins@nl.edu](mailto:seth.harkins@nl.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie>

---

### Recommended Citation

Harkins, Seth B. Dr.. (2012). Mainstreaming, the Regular Education Initiative, and Inclusion as Lived Experience, 1974-2004: A Practitioner's View. *i.e.: inquiry in education: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 4*. Retrieved from: <http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol3/iss1/4>

Copyright © 6-26-2012 by the author(s)

i.e.: inquiry in education is published by the Center for Practitioner Research at the National College of Education, National-Louis University, Chicago, IL.

# **Mainstreaming, the Regular Education Initiative, and Inclusion as Lived Experience, 1974 to 2004: A Practitioner's View**

## **Introduction**

If a new generation of teachers and administrators are to be educated, empowered, and enskilled for inclusive education, these professionals need to understand the mainstreaming, Regular Education Initiative (REI) and inclusion movements in historical and sociopolitical contexts (Deno, 1970; Dunn, 1968; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Osgood, 2004; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Skrtic, 1990; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Will, 1986). In this account, I use my lived experience with these educational movements to illustrate the challenges, possibilities, and limitations associated with them and their implications for teacher education.

## **Auto-ethnographic Methodology**

This inquiry employed auto-ethnography as the research methodology. Auto-ethnographic research (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Hayano, 1979; Quick, 2010) is a form of qualitative inquiry involving personal narrative, critical analysis, and reflection. My research examined the mainstreaming, Regular Education Initiative, and inclusive movements and professional practice I experienced in my 30 years as a teacher and administrator. I used five data sources, including interviews, professional literature, school reports, field notes, and unpublished papers, to reconstruct my experiences with mainstreaming, the REI, and inclusion over my career as a teacher and administrator from 1974 to 2004. My lived experiences provided a basis for reflection in lessons learned and implications for teacher education. Because individuals within this narrative are persons with disabilities, whose identities need to be protected, the actual names of persons, schools, and communities have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

## **Review of Literature**

In 1975, the U.S. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), often referred to as Public Law 94-142. Aside from the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts of the 1960s and Title IX of the Civil

Rights Act, the EAHCA was one of the most far-reaching pieces of federal education legislation enacted in American educational history. This dramatic legislative act brought into the educational system approximately 1 million students who were barred from public education solely on the basis of their disability (Alexander & Alexander, 2005). Rothstein and Johnson (2010) contend that 3 million students with disabilities didn't receive appropriate educations during this time. Building on a civil rights agenda that began with *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and based on *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens v. the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971), *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972), and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the EAHCA imposed a strict set of federal rules and regulations regarding free appropriate public education (FAPE), least restrictive environment (LRE), nondiscriminatory evaluation, individual education programs (IEPs), due process, continuum of educational services, and zero reject on public schools across the country. The EAHCA was sweeping in its impact, particularly with the multitude of U.S. Supreme Court decisions that flowed from ambiguities in the language of the Act that had to be clarified, interpreted, and ultimately enforced.<sup>1</sup> Further, an important Appeals Court decision, *Timothy W. v. Rochester School District* (1989), made it indelibly clear that all children with disabilities must be served under the EAHCA regardless of the severity of their disability. Since its passage in 1975, this federal special education act was renamed the Individuals With Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 and reauthorized in 1997 and 2004.

With the EAHCA came debate and discourse about the mainstreaming of students with disabilities into general education classrooms. With the mainstreaming model (Dunn, 1968), students with disabilities were integrated into general education, but mainstreaming was a largely unsuccessful service delivery system. Many students with mild learning handicaps were educated alongside students without disabilities for most of the school day and benefitted from mainstreaming. However, many students, particularly students with moderate to severe disabilities, were served in special education instructional programs, self-contained classes, and alternative education settings or institutions.

With leadership from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) of the U.S. Department of Education, the REI proposed making the boundaries between general and special education more flexible and promoted the idea that all educators had a responsibility to serve students with disabilities (Will, 1986). Like mainstreaming, the REI had limited success. Some progressive educators forged alliances between general and special educators to increase the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982), *Irving Independent School District v. Tatro* (1984), *School Committee of the Town of Burlington v. Department of Education of Massachusetts* (1985), *Honig v. Doe* (1988), *Florence County v. Carter* (1993), *Sacramento School District v. Rachel H.* (1994), *Cedar Rapids Community School District v. Garret F.* (1999), *Schaeffer v. Weast* (2005), and *Forest Grove School District v. T. A.* (2000).

number of students with disabilities in general education. However, the same tensions that limited mainstreaming limited the REI. Many general educators resisted serving students with disabilities in their classrooms. General educators also lacked training and professional development on how to serve a more diverse student body. The limitation also reflected special educators' lack of training and professional development in the collaboration and consultation skills they needed to support their general education colleagues. As a result, the REI became little more than an expanded mainstreaming model, largely serving students with mild disabilities.

The professional discourse and debate of the 1980s included calls for unitary administration of general and special education (Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Reynolds & Wang, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984). As a new educational subsystem, special education was administered as a separate entity. A number of scholars and practitioners complained that special education was the repository for the hard-to-teach and that overreferral to special education was symptomatic of both educational and organizational challenges (Deno, 1970; Skrtic, 1991). This was especially apparent in the overrepresentation of students of color in special education. African American and Hispanic students were often found in self-contained classes for students with behavior disorders, learning disabilities, or cognitive impairments. Advocates of a unitary administrative system argued that, by bringing all compensatory education services under one roof, special education, Title I Reading and Math, and the English as a Second Language program could be more efficiently and effectively administered (Lipsky & Gardner, 1987; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984).

By no means was there consensus to implement such a model. Indeed, a significant backlash occurred (Mcleskey, 2007). A number of scholars argued that the merger of general and special education was, at best, naïve, and, at worst, reckless (Kauffman, Gerber & Semmel, 1998; Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Lieberman, 1985; Mesinger, 1985). However, within this context, full inclusion of students with disabilities was promoted by parents and educators of students with moderate to severe disabilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Skrtic, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Villa & Thousand, 1995). The inclusion movement spanned the mid-1980s through the turn of the twenty-first century. Proponents argued that

A radical proposition, the inclusion movement generated a passionate and often fierce debate among parents, educators, and policy analysts.

all students, regardless of the severity of disability, should be educated in their neighborhood school with their chronologically aged peers. A radical proposition, the inclusion movement generated a passionate and often fierce debate among parents, educators, and policy analysts. Many school districts adopted this service delivery model, integrating some of the most severe and multiply disabled students in general education. Many schools also resisted the idea, arguing that the idea of full inclusion went too

far. Opponents of full inclusion pointed out that the Least Restrictive Environment clause made specific provision for students who would require more support and structure than could be provided in a general education classroom (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995).

The debate over full inclusion continues today. Since the 1930s (Osgood, 2005), numerous attempts have been made to determine the efficacy of special classes versus integrated education of students with disabilities. Wang (1987) and Wang and Walberg (1988) advanced the Adapted Educational Learning Environments Model (ALEM) to encourage education of students with mild disabilities in general education. The ALEM, however, was met with a storm of criticism (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1988; Kavale & Forness, 2000). McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998) conducted the first comprehensive examination of students with disabilities in general education settings. They acknowledged that the full inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes constituted a major organizational shift for schools and school districts, and they inquired about the leadership and system change knowledge necessary to promote such change. Their review of the systems change literature persuaded them that school-wide leadership was necessary if inclusive practices were to be successfully implemented and sustained. Kavale and Forness (2000), in their extensive meta-analysis of the REI and inclusion, concluded that the benefits of inclusion were mixed and were significantly impacted by teacher attitudes toward students with disabilities and professional development. Schumm and Vaughan (1995) concluded from their 5-year study of the REI and inclusion that the lack of professional development to address teacher attitude and professional practices was a major obstacle to serving students with disabilities in general education. Hence, they advocated a cautious approach to changing service delivery models.

Freeman and Alkin (2000) and Sailor (2002) also conducted syntheses of the literature, but arrived at different conclusions from Kavale and Forness (2000) and Schumm and Vaughan (1995). Freeman and Alkin wrote that full integration for students with mental retardation offered acceptance and the acquisition of social skills that were not likely to be acquired in special education classes. Sailor (2002) also conducted an extensive examination of the literature and concluded that inclusive education was strong in supporting students with disabilities in general education. From Sailor's perspective, the effectiveness of teaching students with disabilities in general education was contingent upon several things, including whole school approaches; administrative support; and professional development for inclusive practices such as co-teaching, class-wide peer tutoring, cooperative learning, meta-cognitive learning strategies, and instructional technologies.

Readers should note that the literature of the mid-1980s to 2000 occurred within the context of the standards-based reform movement. As excellence in education took the spotlight, many special educators and parents worried that the standards movement would mean fewer resources would be available for students with

disabilities. The IDEA Amendments of 1997 were particularly important in this regard because they specified that students with disabilities must be included in district and state-wide achievement testing. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 extended this form of inclusion by insisting that achievement data of students with disabilities be disaggregated in order to 1) ensure inclusion of data regarding students with disabilities and 2) make transparent the progress of students with disabilities within a standards-based general curriculum. The Individuals With Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (2004) further emphasized participation, access, and progress in the general education curriculum. With these three significant statutes and regulations and federal district court decisions in *Daniel R. R. v. Texas* (1989), *Clementine School District v. Oberti* (1993), and the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Sacramento Unified School District v. Holland* (1994), students with disabilities more than ever were presumed to participate in general education. With this, a shift occurred in the literature. While the issue of special class, resource room, and full inclusion in the general education classroom continued to be a major topic of debate among many professionals and parents, the discourse over mainstreaming and full inclusion moderated in 2004 to what curricular and instructional practices and technologies best facilitated access to, participation in, and progress in the general education curriculum.

Although the EAHCA and its amendments had a profoundly beneficial impact on students with disabilities, a gaping hole in the legislation related directly to the outcomes for students with disabilities. The hole was transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary education and adult services. While many school districts recognized the need for this service and implemented prevocational and vocational secondary programs, no regulatory requirements ensured that school districts engaged students and families regarding postsecondary opportunities. The National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner, Newman, D'Amico, Jay, Butler-Nalin, Marder & Cox, 1991) conducted an extensive examination of the progress of students with disabilities after graduation regarding high school completion, personal independence, enrollment in postsecondary education, work experiences, and social activities outside the home. Analysis of the data showed that only 53.3% completed high school, 33% were living independently, 45.7% were not employed 2 years after high school, 14% were attending postsecondary school 2 years after high school and 26.7% were attending postsecondary school between 3 and 5 years after high school (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). These findings were influential when Congress considered reauthorization of the IDEA in 1997.

The 1997 amendments to the legislation defined transition and required secondary school personnel to begin working with students with disabilities at 14 years of age regarding postsecondary goals. The IDEA 2004 revised and extended the transition requirements. By 16 years of age, students with IEPs were to have transition plans that included measurable, objective postsecondary goals. Although the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (2005) indicated improved outcomes for students with disabilities (e.g., high school completion rates

increased to 74%), the overall postsecondary picture for students with disabilities remained challenging. Employment rates for students with disabilities remained low, with only 47.9% of graduates engaged in postsecondary employment and only 19% enrolled in postsecondary school (NTLS2, 2005). Two years after high school, 91% of students with disabilities lived either with their parents or a legal guardian, and 4 years after high school, 72% were living with parents or guardians (NLTS2, Levine and Wagner, 2005). Also, only 40.6% were earning more than \$7 per hour, and only one third received benefits such as health insurance, sick pay, paid vacation, or retirement benefits (NTLS2, Wagner, 2005). Clearly, if the aspirations of students with disabilities, their parents, and their educators are to be realized, considerable work needs to be done to more effectively transition students with disabilities to postsecondary opportunities and success.

Clearly, if the aspirations of students with disabilities, their parents, and their educators are to be realized, considerable work needs to be done to more effectively transition students with disabilities to postsecondary opportunities and success.

### **Experiences and Discussion**

#### **Mainstreaming Before The Education of All Handicapped Children Act**

In the fall of 1974, I assumed a teaching position as an alternative education teacher at Cedar Junior High School. This was before the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) was passed. The junior high considered itself progressive and was proud to be an open classroom school with a special services team consisting of two special education teachers, a school psychologist, a community mental health social worker, a school social worker, and a school nurse. The special education service delivery model was the resource room, where students with learning disabilities and emotional behavior disorders were served for up to half of the school day. The dominant mindset in these years was the medical model, which assumed students who required specialized instruction had learning disorders—problems that could be expertly diagnosed and remediated. Learning problems were seen as primarily residing within the student, not within the system of curriculum or instruction.

As an open classroom school, this school organized its students in pods of 120 with a team of four teachers for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Students who couldn't adapt to the stimulation of the open classroom, which had no classroom walls and extremely porous boundaries between classes and grade levels, were often referred to special education services. This provided relief for regular education teachers and administrators. Many of the students receiving special services were socioeconomically challenged Whites from several trailer park communities in the area. These students stood in stark contrast to the majority of

upwardly mobile middle class students who lived in well-manicured suburban homes.

Within this context, I taught two “alternative education” classes for students considered to be learning disabled and emotionally disturbed. These students were the most alienated adolescents in the building. Indeed, many of these students were continually at odds with authority in general and the school principal in particular. These students were adept at pushing the principal’s emotional buttons, which usually resulted in lengthy out-of-school suspensions.

One student, John Blake, was particularly adept at this and able to pit his parents against the principal and mobilize his peers for further retaliation. Realizing this self-defeating cycle only meant further conflict, aggravation, and scapegoating, a family therapist from the Cedar Community Mental Health Agency and I thought something needed to be done to improve the relationship between these students and the principal. A floor hockey match between the students and staff, which included the principal, was organized. In the hard-fought game, John Blake and the principal collided into each other and emerged laughing. After this initial event, my social worker colleague and I worked to build a relationship between the principal and the alternative education class. Using a daily class meeting format, students invited the principal to participate in their meetings and hear about their daily goal setting. The principal rewarded their efforts by finding funds for weekly field trips if the class met its weekly goals.

With support from the principal, the alternative education class took on an academic and behavioral focus. Students were successfully integrated into industrial arts, art, physical education, home, arts, and physical education. With behavior modification the dominant positive behavior support system, students prided themselves on earning points for academic and behavior success. By the end of the school year, the alternative education class had become a cohesive group with positive relationships between themselves, their staff, and the principal. Two points are important about this experience, which occurred before PL 94-142 became law: 1) students with learning disabilities and emotional behavior disorders were integrated into the school because a partnership was built with teachers and the principal, and 2) the principal gave clear support and administrative authorization for the alternative education program.

### **Mainstreaming and Implementation of PL 94-142**

In 1976, I accepted a position as a special education teacher at West Lake High School. My tenure at this school was unique because the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) had been enacted by Congress in 1975, and the high school’s special education and general education teachers were, like educators across the country, called to implement this sweeping legislation, which mandated free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

As a resource teacher, I taught students with learning disabilities, mild cognitive impairments (termed “educable mentally retarded” at that time), and emotional behavior disorders (termed “seriously emotionally disturbed”) in groups of eight to ten students. The special education program at the high school was a resource and instructional special education program. Most students with disabilities were integrated into the lower track general education classes or individualized special education content area classes. In a given period, a special education teacher typically taught several individualized courses. Each special education teacher also had an assignment as liaison to general education teachers, with the aim of providing consultation and supporting students with disabilities in the mainstream. Working with mainstream faculty was challenging. Some general education teachers welcomed students with IEPs into their classroom, while others either tolerated their presence or “worked the system” to have students transferred to lower track courses or special education classes. The special education program in these years was an outlet for difficult-to-teach students. Some teachers and department chairs engaged in systematic sanitization by referring difficult-to-teach students for special education case study evaluations and placements.

An enlightened guidance department chair initiated a centralized system for screening referrals for special education. This approach gave guidance counselors an opportunity to work with teachers who made uninformed referrals and with teachers who were simply untrained in working with learner diversity. Eventually, this central referral system was expanded into two teams, each consisting of an administrator, guidance counselor, and special education teacher. One team worked with general education teachers on pre-referral interventions, while the other team addressed special education students mainstreamed into general education classes. As special education teachers, we often expressed the view that the larger the enrollment in special education, the greater the incidence of curriculum disabilities.

### **The Politics of Mainstreaming and the Regular Education Initiative**

In the spring of 1980, I became chair of the Twin Rivers South High School special education department. The special education department served approximately 250 students a day. The special education program was described as “comprehensive” because it involved resource instruction, departmentalized instruction for students challenged with cognitive impairments, and a self-contained program for students with emotional behavior disorders.

A measure of the relationship between regular and special education was the special education department’s relationship with the Dean’s Office. At the direction of the principal, the dean published a daily log of students with IEPs who were involved in some kind of disciplinary event. The implication was that the special education department should discipline students with IEPs.

This “our kids versus your kids” position reflected the principal’s ongoing battle with Dr. JoAnne Fairfield, the district director of special education. As Fairfield reported to the superintendent, organizational politics complicated the situation. The principal and his counterpart at Twin Rivers North High School seemed to resent not having direct control over the special education department in their buildings. The principals also seemed to resent that the district director of special education—a woman with less seniority and less span of administrative control—had the superintendent’s ear.

In this tense environment, I found it extremely difficult to get rooted in the department and the building. The tension also explained the revolving door of special education department chairs. To say that the high school’s special education department was a stressful place to work was an understatement. Some special education faculty allied with the principal and were contemptuous of Fairfield and of me, by extension. Others were solidly supportive of Fairfield. Moreover, the general education faculty was divided over the issue of mainstreaming. Competency testing was used to limit special education students’ access to general education classes. Further, the students’ parents often knew exactly what they wanted out of a special education program. Parents frequently employed an emerging cadre of special education attorneys to file for due process hearings.

As at West Lake High School, the special education referral process at this high school was political. Not uncommonly, a student who presented behavior management challenges was regarded as behavior disordered and therefore in need of special education. Also as at West Lake, some faculty genuinely used the special education referral process to help struggling students, while others used the process to sanitize their classes. Some teachers believed these students belonged in special education because the students couldn’t compete in a highly competitive academic environment. As well, some teachers referred students for screening and case study because the teachers simply didn’t know how to teach students who learned differently. These tensions played out in the weekly multidisciplinary team meetings at the school. For students who had IEPs, the process of supporting them in the mainstream fell to special education case managers, whose success depended completely on their ability to establish a relationship with the general education counterpart. On the whole, these relationships were built with teachers who taught lower tracked academic and nonacademic classes.

To respond to the tensions with the Dean’s Office, I found it critical to establish a positive relationship with the disciplinary officers. Fortunately, I was a long-distance runner as were the dean and the dean’s assistant. We began to take 5-mile runs at the end of the school day and talked about students with special needs who were being referred for discipline problems. These after-school runs were extremely productive in opening communication and building a collaborative relationship. In particular, the deans and I collaborated in helping to build positive

relationships with students enrolled in a self-contained class for students with emotional behavior disorders.

As noted, mainstreaming was the special education model at this high school. While the majority of students were mainstreamed into general education classes, students with moderate learning disabilities, cognitive impairments, and emotional behavior disorders were served through departmental instructional classes or self-contained classes for students with emotional behavior disorders. In fact, most of the high school's students didn't interact with them. Great efforts were made by special education teachers and guidance counselors to find some general education classes for these students. Often, this took the form of art, music, industrial arts, and some content area classes with gifted teachers who were skilled at teaching students with exceptional needs. The result was that virtually all students with special education needs were integrated to some degree in general education. However, sustaining students in general education was a significant challenge. Taken by the REI debate, special education teachers, their allies within the academic and nonacademic departments, and sympathetic guidance counselors worked to make the boundaries between general education and special education more flexible.

...what propelled the REI at this high school was a crisis between general and special education.

Readers should note that what propelled the REI at this high school was a crisis between general and special education. While the principals from the two high schools seemed to resent that Fairfield reported to the superintendent and that they didn't have direct control over special education, they also seemed happy to have Fairfield be "principal of special education" when

conflict arose. The principals and the Twin Rivers Education Association continued to generate grievances against Fairfield, myself or my special education colleagues at the high school or the Twin Rivers Off-Campus Center, the district's therapeutic day school.

While Dr. Glen Thompson was superintendent, the two principals' actions against special education remained in check. The charismatic superintendent liked and respected Fairfield. The parent of a child with a disability, Thompson didn't trust principals to manage, much less provide leadership for, special education. In the superintendent's view, the principals regularly abdicated leadership over the issue of mainstreaming and discipline of students with disabilities. Superintendent Thompson was a staunch advocate for all students, particularly students on the margins—special education and talented and gifted students. The superintendent retired and was succeeded by Dr. Stephen Martin, a superintendent who worked differently from what we experienced with Thompson. The leadership change was an opportunity for the two principals to realign their roles and have Fairfield

report to them. With a contract negotiation in his first year as the district superintendent, Martin was vulnerable to the principals' teaming up with the education association over personnel issues in the district's special education departments.

The new superintendent made an immediate splash in the emerging excellence in education reform movement by facilitating recognition of the two high schools by the U.S. Department of Education. As the education association campaigned for salaries worthy of excellence in education, the two principals permitted special education faculty to end run their department chairs' decisions. Thus, Fairfield's position, leadership, and authority and that of her department chairs was brought into question. The new superintendent was invited to meet with special education faculty at an off-site location that had been the venue for teacher union rallies in previous contract negotiations. While claiming to "just listen" to the grievances of special education faculty, the superintendent, through his symbolic listening, in effect de-authorized Fairfield and her administrative team.

Adeptly, Fairfield used this crisis in confidence to engineer a management group facilitated by a well-respected organizational consultant, Dr. Mark Greenberg, as a way to bridge the divide between herself, the superintendent, and the principals. The consultant helped the management group see that the conflict involved scapegoating and the location of larger systems issues in special education. What culminated in the superintendent's meeting with the special education faculty was symptomatic of complex organizational dynamics involving psychological projection. These projections were a defense against teachers' fears of failure and feelings of inadequacy in dealing with student failure within a broader climate of the excellence in education movement. The fear of student failure was evident in the high volume of case study evaluation referrals and the location of the responsibility for dealing with school failure in the special education programs. With intense relationship building between Fairfield and the special education department chairs, superintendent, and principals, a series of professional development opportunities were launched. The superintendent became fond of saying that "student mainstreaming couldn't occur without mainstreaming the faculty." The result was a number of strategic efforts to network the special education department chairs with general education department chairs. This, in turn, led to an increase in special education consultation and collaboration with general educators and some co-teaching. It was as if the REI had actually arrived in the Twin Rivers School District.

### **Inclusion: Possibilities and Limitations**

In 1993, I became director of special education of a newly formed school district, Lakeview Elementary School District. The communities of East Lake, West Lake, and South Lake had struggled with the bankruptcy and demise of North Lake Elementary School District. Challenged by declining revenue and considerable debt, the North Lake district dissolved. North Lake was likely to be annexed to

the two adjacent elementary districts. Neither school district championed an annexation. A number of educational and civic leaders proposed consolidating the three districts into one. The consolidation was put to a vote. The vote was preceded by a vitriolic and volatile campaign, as many East Lake residents feared the growing Hispanic population of North Lake. Fortunately, the majority of voters in the two communities affirmed the possibilities of diversity in voting to create Lakeview Elementary School District.

This new position offered an opportunity to create an inclusive special education program from the traditional models operated by the legacy school districts. The board of education and the superintendent recognized that the interface of special and general education was changing with the REI and inclusion movements.

On my first day of work, I found a stack of student files on my desk. Each file represented a complex matter that required immediate administrative attention. The predecessor administrators had decided to pass the decision making off to the new school district administration. Among the files was that of Martin Schaeffer, a first-grade student with severe cerebral palsy. The file was easily a foot thick and contained weekly letters from Martin's father to the superintendent of the special education cooperative agreement to which Lakeview was a member. The matter of Martin Schaeffer clearly was headed for litigation. Martin's parents had little respect for Martin's out-of-district, special education joint agreement placement. Although Martin was being educated in a general education building, serious problems existed regarding literacy, assistive technology, special transportation, staff relations, and communication. These prompted Mr. and Mrs. Schaeffer to seek placement for Martin in the Lakeview District. After meeting with the parents and hearing their story, I was persuaded that Martin belonged in the Lakeview School District. Moreover, I was persuaded that, unless Martin was able to integrate an augmentative communication system, he would never develop meaningful language and therefore no meaningful social relationships with peers or teachers. He required general education peers in a general education classroom to provide this support. As a result, an IEP meeting with all stakeholders involved with Martin was convened. A consensus decision was made to enroll Martin in a Lakeview Elementary District general education first-grade class.

While the ideal situation was to enroll Martin in his neighborhood school, Martin's neighborhood school was built in 1910 and Martin, a wheelchair user, couldn't access the building. Lakeview had only two elementary schools that were single story with easy access for wheelchair users. One school, West Elementary School, had successfully embraced a program for children with hearing impairments and prided itself on the faculty's creative ways of including students with disabilities in general education classes. As fortune would have it, I had a relationship with the principal, Michael Rossi, who had been a colleague of mine in doctoral study. The two of us held similar beliefs about inclusion and educational leadership issues.

While the decision to implement full inclusion had been made by the IEP team, the details of the process were complicated. First, significant trust issues existed

between the Schaeffers and school personnel in general. The parents had been soured by their experience with the special education cooperative and feared that a similar circumstance could arise in Lakeview if they didn't have significant input and control over certain processes. In particular, the Schaeffers wanted nothing to do with the special education cooperative personnel. Further, in their view, the decision to hire a one-to-one teacher assistant was critical, and they expressed a desire to be part of the interview and hiring process. As this was something that hadn't been done by the predecessor school districts, the inclusion of parents in this decision making presented a unique challenge and opportunity. Second, although West Elementary had a long tradition of including students with disabilities in general education, Martin Schaeffer represented a different challenge, one of full inclusion. Third, a process had to be developed to ensure clear, open, and transparent communication. This required that the parents, principal, and I work closely together on virtually everything that needed to be communicated about Martin's needs.

To address these challenges, the principal and I made several decisions together. The first was assigning Martin to a classroom with a teacher open to full inclusion. In the principal's view, a new first-year hire, Karen Ward, was the appropriate teacher, given her personality and experience working with students with disabilities. The second decision involved making the parents full members of the interview team in the hiring of the one-to-one teacher assistant. A third decision involved related services personnel—speech language therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. The Schaeffer's private therapy team was hired to provide Martin's educationally related services. The reasoning here was the process of inclusion would go much smoother if an already intact team was available to help Martin, his first-grade classmates, and the teacher. The final decision to be made involved a communication process between all personnel working with Martin. It was agreed that the team would meet once a week to discuss Martin's progress and that the principal would lead the team meetings. While disagreements occurred from time to time, team meetings were both task and process focused. The principal was a critical factor in ensuring that open and transparent communication occurred between team meetings as well as making sure that team decisions were implemented and evaluated.

Within the first year, two other opportunities occurred to further inclusion in Lakeview Elementary School District. The parents of Nathaniel Taylor, a student challenged with autism, requested that their son transfer from the special education cooperative's early childhood special education program to a general education kindergarten. The Taylors were concerned that Nathaniel had no interactions with typically developing children, and they wondered what his progress might be if consistently exposed to typical student language, social, and behavioral models. As with the Martin Schaeffer situation, an IEP meeting was convened and IEP goals were reviewed and adjusted to reflect Nathaniel's full inclusion in the Creekside Elementary School kindergarten.

Also within the first year, a sixth-grade student, Gillian Wexler, with a profile similar to Martin Schaeffer's, moved into the district. Her IEP specified her full inclusion in a general education sixth grade. With the support of the principal, the technical expertise of a special education supervisor, and the assignment of a special education case manager, Gillian was enrolled at North Lake Junior High. Moreover, a student with autism, Darren Cooper, transferred to Lakeview with an IEP that called for full inclusion within a general education third grade.

To me, the boundaries between regular and special education clearly needed to become more porous and flexible. With the support of the board of education, superintendent, and assistant superintendent committed to the co-teaching model, a district-wide task force on special education was convened to study current special education structures and practices. For a full academic year, the task force took up a range of issues and concerns about what comprehensive special education services were needed to address the diverse needs of the Lakeview communities, including improved special education services for second language learners. The task force consisted of a diverse group of stakeholders, including board members, teachers, parents, and consultants. The task force members held strong opinions about mainstreaming, the REI, and inclusion. They also had strong feelings about the merger of the predecessor districts and whether the merger was in the best interest of the community. Indeed, strong feelings about the consolidation frequently surfaced as both grief and mourning over the loss of the predecessor districts and wishes or fantasies about what the new Lakeview School District could become. The task force was itself an example of inclusion, embracing a wide range of beliefs and opinions. With the use of a strategic planning model, the task force successfully formed a vision and mission, beliefs and values, a set of 5-year goals, and action plans.

The result of the task force was a report to the board of education that recommended returning Lakeview students placed from out-of-district special education placements on a student-by-student basis. Professional development to facilitate inclusion was central to the strategic plan. Principals were charged with the responsibility for creating welcoming environments for these students. Although the task force report didn't recommend dismantling self-contained or resource special education classes, the clear direction was to provide more opportunities for students with disabilities in general education.

With a change in the superintendency, I was appointed assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Within this role, the administration of general and special education were brought together under the office of curriculum and instruction. Lakeview thus had a unitary administrative approach to general and special education. With the assistance of a team of curriculum and special education supervisors, inclusive education was infused into professional development activities. A Lakeview curriculum was implemented and emphasized co-teaching, differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, meta-cognitive learning strategies, and multiple intelligences.

Despite this, challenges continually emerged in facilitating an inclusive model. One student with autism, Darren Cooper, who was fully included at Timberland Elementary School, demonstrated the limits of full inclusion. A student who was successfully included in third and fourth grades, Darren hit a developmental rough patch in fifth grade that his instructional staff couldn't fully understand. When frustrated, Darren would throw objects at teachers and students, physically aggress against others, and otherwise completely disrupt the learning environment. Additionally, Darren would run from the school into a busy street. Frequently, Darren required removal to another classroom or office for intervention. Mr. and Mrs. Cooper strenuously objected to Darren's removal from the classroom. Despite efforts to systematically study Darren's outbursts, and notwithstanding the help of behavior consultants, the Timberland staff was unable to effectively intervene with Darren in the general education classroom. When a teacher assistant was physically harmed, requiring hospital emergency room attention, the principal and special education supervisor sought the cooperation of the parents, who continued to object to interventions in a separate space in the Timberland building. With the prospect of further behavioral challenges and serious injury occurring, I sought a court injunction under *Honig v. Doe* (1988) to temporarily place Darren in an alternative interim education service so he could stabilize and be re-integrated into general education. Eventually, an agreement was struck between the parents and the Lakeview School District to provide a partial inclusion arrangement with opportunities for behavioral support in and out of the general education classroom.

### **Conclusions: Lessons Learned**

My lived experience with mainstreaming, the REI, and inclusion occurred within the sociopolitical environment from 1974 to 2004.

As a teacher and an administrator, I found this period to be a high-velocity time as special education as we know it today was bolted onto general education. The challenge of integrating students with disabilities into general education involved advocacy from parents, teachers, and administrators. It was met with overt and covert resistance. Throughout this period, considerable conflict and frustration ensued. To be sure, there were successes in creating inclusive educational environments, but there were also limitations. From the era of teaching before the EACHA to the passage of the IDEA 2004, I have drawn seven important conclusions and lessons learned.

The movement for inclusive schooling was both an educational and a political phenomenon that must be understood within the historic contexts in which it occurred.

1. The movement for inclusive schooling was both an educational and a political phenomenon that must be understood within the historic contexts in which it occurred.

2. The inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes occurred within a sociopolitical context. Thus, emerging educators need to understand the politics and dynamics change. The challenge of inclusion involves understanding the system in which it occurs. Thus, the current and new generation of educators need to understand schools as complex social systems.
3. Resistance to inclusion is ultimately about fear and anxiety of the unknown. Therefore, current and future educators need to be skilled in dealing with the emotional dynamics of educating students with disabilities alongside general education students. In particular, teachers must learn to manage their own fear and anxiety and understand these emotional dynamics at group and systems levels.
4. To overcome the tensions associated with the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education, active building of partnerships is critical. Therefore, collaboration and problem-solving skills are essential for special and general educators.
5. Partnerships alone are not enough to facilitate inclusion. Institutional authority from the board of education down through the principals is required to make the education of students with disabilities in general education settings a priority. Thus, educators need to understand the importance of institutional authorization in order to take up and exercise their own authority.
6. Ongoing professional development in inclusive practices for general and special educators is clearly necessary to facilitate inclusion. Such practices as collaboration, co-teaching, differentiated instruction, class-wide peer tutoring, cooperative learning, meta-cognitive learning strategies, and curriculum-based assessment benefit all students.
7. The challenge of inclusion is providing adequate resources and a commitment to the principle of individualization and learning from our failures.

It is often said that failure to understand and appreciate the past results in repeating past failures in the future.

It is often said that failure to understand and appreciate the past results in repeating past failures in the future. To avoid the pitfalls of the past, we must understand the general and special education relationship within the sociopolitical context. Further, leaders must be willing to challenge assumptions and take the political risks necessary to achieve the vision of inclusive education. Moreover, to achieve the benefits of inclusion for all students, board of education authority, skillful administrative leadership, systematic and supportive mentoring, and supervision are vital for general and special educators.

**Seth Harkins** is assistant professor in the Department of Diversity in Learning and Teaching at National Louis University. Dr. Harkins' career spans forty-two years and has includes teaching and administration in elementary and secondary school districts and higher education. He has served in a number of capacities including special education teacher, special education director, principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent, director of the Individual Care Grant Program for the Illinois Department of Human Services, and due process hearing officer for the Illinois State Board of Education.

### References

- Alexander, K., & Alexander, M.D. (2005). *American public school law* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) (p. 491). Belmont, CA: Thompson West.
- Blackorby, J., & Wagner, M. (1996). Longitudinal post school outcomes of youth with disabilities: Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study. *Exceptional Children*, 62(5), 399–414.
- Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Amy Rowley, 458 U.S. 176 (1982).
- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
- Cedar Rapids Community School District v. Garret F., 526 U.S. 66 (1999).
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 413–427). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Daniel R. R. v. State Board of Education, 874 F.2d 1036 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1989).
- Deno, E. (1970). Special education as developmental capital. *Exceptional Children*, 37(3), 229–237.
- Dunn, L. (1968). Special Education for the mildly retarded—Is much of it justifiable? *Exceptional Children*, 35(1), 5–22.
- Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, P.L. 94-142, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (1996). *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

- Florence County School District Four v. Carter, 510 U.S. 7, 114 S.Ct. 361 (1993).
- Forest Grove School District v. T. A., 523 F.3d 1078, U.S. (2009).
- Freeman, F. N., & Alkin, M. C. (2000). Academic and social attainments of children with mental retardation in general and special education settings. *Remedial and Special Education*, 21(1), 3–18.
- Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. S. (1988). An evaluation of the Adaptive Learning Environments Model. *Exceptional Children*, 55(2), 115–127.
- Hayano, D. M. (1979). Auto-ethnography: Paradigms, problems, and prospects. *Human Organization*, 38, 113–120.
- Honig v. Doe, 484 U.S.305, 108 S.Ct. 592 (1988).
- Irving Independent School District v. Tatro, 468 U.S. 883, 104 S.Ct. 3371 (1984).
- Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act of 1990, P.L. 104-476, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.
- Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act of 1997, P.L. 105-17, 20 U.S.C.1400 et seq.
- Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act of 2004, P.L. 108-446, 20 U.S.C.1400 et seq.
- Kaufman, J. M., Gerber, M. M., & Semmel, M. I. (1988). Arguable assumptions underlying the Regular Education Initiative. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 21 (1), 6–11.
- Kauffman, J. M., & Hallahan, D. P. (1995). *The illusion of full-inclusion: A comprehensive critique of a current special education bandwagon*. Austin, TX: ProEd.
- Kavale, K. A., & Forness, S. R. (2000). History, rhetoric and reality: Analysis of the inclusion debate. *Remedial and Special Education*, 21(5), 279–296.
- Levin, P. & Wagner, M. (2005). The household circumstances and emerging independence of out-of-school youth with disabilities. *National longitudinal transition study 2: After high school: A first look at the post high school experiences of youth with disabilities*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.
- Lieberman, L. M. (1985). Special and regular education: A merger made in heaven? *Exceptional Children*, 51(6), 513–516.
- Lipsky, D. K., & Gartner, A. (1997). *Inclusion and school reform: Transforming America's classrooms*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

- McCleskey, J. (2007). *Reflections on inclusion: Classic articles that shaped our thinking*. Alexandria, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.
- McGregor, G., & Vogelsberg, R. T. (1998). *Inclusive schooling practices: Pedagogical and research foundations: A synthesis of the literature that informs best practices about inclusive schooling* (Allegheny University). University of Montana, Rural Institute on Disabilities.
- Mesinger, J. F. (1985). Commentary on “A rationale for the merger of special and regular education,” or is it now time for the lamb to lie down with the lion. *Exceptional Children*, 51(6), 510–512.
- Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia, 348 F. Supp. (D.C.C. 1972).
- Oberti v. Board of Education, 995 F.2d 1204 (3<sup>rd</sup> Cir. 1993).
- Osgood, R. L. (2005). *The history of inclusion in the United States*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 334 F. Supp. 1257 (E.D. Pa. 1971) and 343 F. Supp; 279 (E.D. Pa. 1972).
- Quick, J. (2010). Narrative strategies in educational research: Reflections on a critical autoethnography. *Educational Action Research*, 18(2), 239–254.
- Reynolds, M. C., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (1987). The necessary restructuring of special and regular education. *Exceptional Children*, 53(5), 391–398.
- Rothstein, L., & Johnson, S. F. (2010). *Special education law* (p. 10). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Sacramento City School District v. Rachel H., 14 F.3d 1398 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1994).
- Sailor, W. (2002). Inclusion. Testimony before the Research Agenda Task Force of the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, pp. 2–35. Nashville, TN: Research Agenda Task Force Meeting and Public Hearing, Peabody College of Vanderbilt University.
- School Committee of the Town of Burlington v. Department of Education of Massachusetts, 471 U.S. 359, 105 S.Ct. 1996 (1985).
- Schaeffer v. Weast, 377 F.3d 449, 546 U.S. (2005).
- Schumm, J. S., & Vaughn, S. (1995). Getting ready for inclusion: Is the stage set? *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 10(3), 169–79.
- Skrtic, T.M. (1990). *Behind special education: A critical analysis of professional culture and school organization* (pp. 51–84). Denver: Love Publishing.

- Stainback, W., & Stainback, S. (1984). A rationale for the merger of special and regular education. *Exceptional Children*, 51(2), 102–111.
- Timothy W. v. Rochester School District, 875 F.2d 954 (1<sup>st</sup> Cir. 1989).
- Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, P.L. 93-112. 29 U.S.C. 701 et seq
- Villa, R. A., & Thousand, J. S. (1995). *Creating an inclusive school* (pp. 28–44). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Wagner, M., Newman, N., D’Amico, R., Jay, D. E., Butler-Nalin, P., Marderm, C. & Cox, R. (1991). *The first comprehensive report from the national longitudinal transition study of special education students: Youth with disabilities: How are they doing?* Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.
- Wang, M. C. (1987). Toward achieving educational excellence for all students: Program design and student outcomes. *Remedial and Special Education*, 8, 25–34.
- Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (1988). Four fallacies of segregationism. *Exceptional Children*, 55(2), 128–137.
- Will, M. (1986). Educating children with learning problems: A shared responsibility. *Exceptional Children*, 52(5), 411–415.